



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Kirby Kruger
State Epidemiologist
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.2378
E-mail: kkruger@state.nd.us

State Health Department Urges Livestock Owners To Take Precautions Against Contracting Anthrax From Sick Animals

BISMARCK, N.D. – People who work with livestock are urged to take precautions to avoid contracting anthrax from sick animals, according to Kirby Kruger, state epidemiologist for the North Dakota Department of Health.

The outbreak of anthrax among livestock in eastern North Dakota has affected animals in nine counties; however, no human cases of anthrax have been reported during this outbreak, Kruger said.

“Although the risk is low for anthrax to be transmitted from animals to people, we are reminding people who work with livestock to follow some basic common-sense recommendations to reduce that risk even more,” Kruger said.

People who work with livestock suspected of having anthrax should follow these precautions:

- Minimize direct contact with sick or dead animals.
- Wear rubber boots and gloves when handling animals or carcasses.
- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Wash and disinfect rubber gloves and boots when finished.
- Wash hands and exposed skin with soap and running water.
- Burn dead animals on site.

Outbreaks of anthrax among animals occur naturally in North Dakota; however, only two cases of human anthrax have been reported since 1967. Both of these cases were the cutaneous or skin form of the disease. The last case of human disease was reported in 2000 and was associated with an anthrax outbreak in southeastern North Dakota.

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: health@state.nd.us

Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

Anthrax in humans can take three different forms.

- Cutaneous anthrax is the most common naturally occurring form. It is seldom fatal and can be treated easily with antibiotics. It can start out as a bump where the bacteria entered the skin through a preexisting cut or wound. The bump will fill with fluid and then the center will start to die and turn black.
- Inhalational or pulmonary anthrax is a very rare form of the disease and is most likely to result from an intentional release of anthrax such as was seen in the eastern United States in 2001. It is extremely rare that people get inhalational anthrax from animals. Symptoms include fever, body aches, headache and cough. The disease progresses very rapidly, and breathing becomes difficult as the lungs fill with fluid. Inhalational anthrax has a high death rate.
- Gastro-intestinal anthrax occurs after eating undercooked meat from anthrax-infected animals. People may develop abdominal cramping, fever, diarrhea and bloody diarrhea. This is a serious form of disease and requires immediate medical treatment.

“Usually, people who have had casual exposure to infected animals do not need treatment with antibiotics. Examples of casual exposure include being around the animals or feeding them,” Kruger said. “However, people who have had direct skin contact with infected blood or body fluids should contact their health-care provider, especially if they begin having symptoms of anthrax infection.”

A fact sheet with information about exposure to anthrax-infected livestock is available on the North Dakota Department of Health website at www.ndhealth.gov/disease.

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